A Vision of a Transformed Nonprofit Sector

Technology is a powerful enabler. It can leverage skill, insight, creativity, wisdom, and experience, letting people and organizations more fully achieve their greatest aspirations. No less than the profit-seeking business, the not-for-profit human service, civil rights, community development, health, environmental, or arts group can reap immense benefit from technology's resourceful use.

Imagine this: Every staff member at every nonprofit organization and foundation uses computers as easily as pen and paper, the telephone, or a fax machine. More importantly, they understand the technology's potential — having participated in making it an integral part of their agency's organizational plan — and are excited to test its limits to advance their group's mission. Everyone knows how to use e-mail and other forms of telecommunications to manage data and people, to deliver services, to raise money, and to recruit donors, sponsors, members, and volunteers. Staff coordinate strategic planning and day-to-day activities through an on-line calendar, while participating in videoconferences with colleagues around the state — or around the globe — from their desks. All systems — phone, fax, computer, copy machines — are streamlined and work together for maximum efficiency. When a problem arises, fast and capable help is on call.

What is more, a team regularly convenes to consider the challenges the organization is facing, and to brainstorm about technology's role in possible answers. The expertise needed to interpret the problem and implement a solution using appropriate and cost-effective technology is affordable and available. At the same time, this participatory problem-solving generates ideas for technology experts to invent software and systems to address new needs, while making their innovations available to the rest of the sector at a fair rate of exchange. By making technology solutions affordable for everyone — and easy to adapt to others' specific needs — the sector's capacity to educate, advocate, and serve grows exponentially.

Technology is used to serve nonprofits' missions. Everyone who provides technology assistance to the sector not only shares what it is they do or build, but also expands upon and re-engineers each other's ideas and products. Diverse approaches to providing assistance are integrated so that each delivery method — whether "circuit riders," a technology center, volunteer problem solvers, or corporate mentors — builds off the efforts and successes of each other. Synergy catalyzes innovation, while commitment to the sector makes anything possible.

The National Strategy for Nonprofit Technology

This is the vision of the National Strategy for Nonprofit Technology (NSNT), a leadership network of nonprofit staff members, funders, and technology assistance providers working together to analyze the technology needs of the nonprofit sector, and to develop a blueprint for how it can use technology more effectively and creatively. After an intensive year of research and consultation, the Planning Partners of the NSNT are convinced of the urgent need for a breakthrough strategy to enable the nation's nonprofits to use technology to enhance their vision, their effectiveness, and their mission.

The year of research has shown that most nonprofits are hesitant to use technology and are ill-informed about the impact it could have on their work, that funders are reluctant to invest in efforts that seem unrelated to program delivery, and that technology assistance providers are ill-equipped to provide the kind and scale of support necessary to transform the nonprofit sector's use of technology. Also, research indicates that there are disparities in nonprofits' access to and use of technology — namely, that many nonprofits in low-income communities and in communities of color are underserved with respect to technology acquisition and use. Overall, the fundamental problems causing this situation are lack of knowledge, fragmentation, turf protection, inadequate investment, and lack of skills.

The year has also identified important opportunities to improve efficiency and fundamentally restructure how nonprofits, both individually and collectively, do their work. Without this restructuring, nonprofits run the risk of becoming marginalized. With such restructuring, nonprofits can be positioned to continue to bring to the whole economy — electronic and non-electronic — the values of community and caring that today are too often neglected.

While our original commitment was to analyze and map needs and opportunities, this process has taught us that effecting a solution requires a fundamental breakthrough that represents a collective change in behavior for the entire sector.

We need a "big bang" to change fundamental assumptions about how the sector moves forward — a new way of thinking and of working together that shatters old assumptions and creates a new sense of possibility. There are four core principles we believe can fuel this "big bang": **Technology Transparency, Open Systems, Fair Exchange, and Fair Compensation.**

- **Technology Transparency** is the idea that information technology should be a tool whose suitability, benefit, and ease of use makes it employment second nature (like the telephone).
- **Open Systems** is an approach to technology innovation that emphasizes continuous contribution by many authors, with the results owned by no one, and by everyone.
- **Fair Exchange** is the principle that those who receive the benefit of another's technology should in some fashion reciprocate, propelling still more forward movement.
- **Fair Compensation** is the idea that those who bring their time and talents to the cause of empowering nonprofits with technology deserve due recognition, financial and otherwise.

We believe that if all players commit to these principles — and to working with those who also commit to the principles — nonprofits will realize the vision to use technology well, funders will have the confidence to support such work, and technology assistance providers will be most effective and creative.

Making the Vision Real: The Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network — N-TEN

This report depicts the need for, and makes recommendations about the initial shape of, a new entity that we believe can trigger that "big bang." Specifically, we describe a new consortium — tentatively named the Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network, or N-TEN — coordinated by a member-based secretariat, and working with and for its member organizations.

N-TEN is emphatically not meant to be yet another trade association. Rather, it is envisioned as a principles-driven convenor and facilitator that can enable many different interests to powerfully collaborate in strengthening nonprofits through technology. It will foster this collaboration while respecting — indeed celebrating — the diversity, autonomy, and community-rootedness of its members. For it is these attributes that enable these groups to respond with agility, ingenuity, and passion to the needs of their individual stakeholders.

Guided by the core principles of Technology Transparency, Open Systems, Fair Exchange, and Fair Compensation, N-TEN will involve nonprofits, the funding community, and technology assistance providers, in shared undertakings that — depending on member input — could include:

- The development of community-based, technology assistance models.
- The construction of a nonprofit technology portal on the World Wide Web. This portal —a kind of online co-op — would be a place where nonprofits, and those providing technology assistance to nonprofits, could collaborate, and find the tech tools, skills, know-how, ideas, and partners they need to help them do their jobs better.
- The creation of tools to help nonprofits and technology assistance providers assess organizational use of technology and determine its effectiveness in furthering a group's mission.
- The development of people trained and motivated to help meet nonprofits' technology needs.
- The cultivation of new relationships between the nonprofit sector and high-technology companies.
- The establishment of alternative funding mechanisms that apply and build on the principles and initiatives of the NSNT.

We believe that N-TEN can unleash energies and synergies that can transform the nonprofit landscape, ensuring that the sector survives and thrives in the dawning century. The critical importance of what nonprofits do — delivering vital human and health services, championing the disadvantaged, defending our planet, challenging and inspiring us with art — demands no less.

The United States Commerce Department reports that corporate investment in information technology has quadrupled over the last decade, now representing 53 percent — up from 29 percent — of all expenditures on equipment. Similar increases have been witnessed in business outlays on software, consulting, technology support, and training.

Many economists think this technology investment deserves much of the credit for the economic boom the United States currently enjoys. "A remarkable element in our recent prosperity has been the rapid acceleration in the application of computer and telecommunications technologies," Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan observed in a March 1999 speech. Such technologies, said Greenspan, have brought a "significant" increase in productivity.

Economist Daniel Sichel, long a skeptic about the contribution of technology to business productivity, now counts himself a convert. In a paper in the Spring 1999 issue of "Business Economics," Sichel notes "a striking step up in the contribution of computers to output growth…raising the possibility that businesses are finally reaping the benefits of information technology."

Carrots for Nonprofit Technology Use…

Nonprofits, too, can and do benefit from information technology investments, using them to improve service delivery, reduce administrative costs, and expand their outreach. Consider:

- A public interest group is using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) — software that takes information from a database and creates compellingly detailed maps — to illustrate the proximity of toxic sites to the homes, schools, and parks in a low-income neighborhood. Armed with these powerful visuals, neighborhood residents have been able to press for speedier site cleanup.
- A nonprofit in a large city has created an Internet-accessible database containing over 5,000 detailed listings of area organizations that provide social services like job training, child care, Head Start, and alcohol and substance abuse treatment.
- A dining room for the homeless has begun tracking volunteers and daily schedules with an electronic database — all work that used to be done on 3x5 cards. This is saving hundreds of hours of staff time, time that can be devoted to improving services. Now the organization is beginning to use a database to better manage its clothing assistance program, which each month distributes thousands of articles of donated clothing to people in need.
- Using a state-of-the-art database, an environmental group was able, in the space of only two months, to mobilize 175,000 people to offer public comments in favor of protecting imperiled wildlands.

Yet numerous surveys and interviews reveal that the great majority of nonprofits fail to capitalize on technology's potential. Many nonprofits don't yet know how powerful an impact technology can have in their work. They don't know how to weave technology into their overall organizational plan and budget. They lack the resources to acquire the needed hardware and software, and for the training and support to put it to good use. They don't know where to turn for guidance that is both affordable and knowledgeable about nonprofits' specific needs and challenges.

...and Sticks

Technology holds rich potential to help nonprofits work more productively and creatively. But parallel with the opportunities for nonprofits that embrace technology are threats for those that do not. The penalties for inattention to technology — and to the new efficiencies it can afford — could include:

Inability to meet potential increases in service demand. Changes in governmental policy toward the poor, the effects of which are now buffered by prosperity, could bring severe new pressures on nonprofits like homeless shelters and food banks if the economy stumbles.

Loss of funding due to inability to demonstrate program outcomes. Many nonprofits depend heavily on government funding, and are facing ever more rigorous standards of performance accountability, principally owing to the Government Performance and Results Act (P.L. 103-62). The Results Act requires federal agencies to develop strategic plans for implementing their missions and to specify performance measures for each of their programs. Nonprofits which receive federal grants – even indirectly through state and local governments – are therefore increasingly expected to quantifiably demonstrate that their program is meeting intended goals, that the means are efficient, and that hard data are guiding the program's continuous improvement.

Inability to compete with for-profit enterprises. Businesses are increasingly entering areas that were once the exclusive province of nonprofits. A January 1999 article in the *Harvard Business Review* reports that Lockheed Martin IMS — a division of the defense giant Lockheed Martin — has won more than 20 contracts to provide Welfare to Work services in four states. The services being provided by Lockheed Martin include case management, skills training, job placement assistance, child care, mental health services, treatment for drug and alcohol abuse — "the same kinds of services that government agencies had contracted to nonprofits for years." "This much is sure," asserts William P. Ryan, the article's author. "As long as government agencies demand the kind of contracts that can best be executed by well-capitalized, technologically sophisticated companies like Lockheed Martin, nonprofits will be at a decided disadvantage."

Inability to communicate effectively with their constituencies. As the Internet and digital communications rearrange the relationships between businesses and government and their constituencies, nonprofits risk losing their voice. Other sectors are investing heavily in technology to attract and maintain the attention of new constituencies. In order to compete in this new communications world, nonprofits, entrusted with supporting our social values, will need to embrace and use the Internet and information technology on the same level as business and government.

The Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network: N-TEN Role, Guiding Principles and Goals

While most nonprofits are far from taking full advantage of technology's promise, tremendous energy and achievement surrounds the effort. Groups at both national and local levels are delivering wide-ranging technology assistance to nonprofits, and in the process, building a wealth of valuable and sharable knowledge and tools.

A year of study and deliberation has convinced the National Strategy for Nonprofit Technology Planning Partners of the need for a new consortium — working to strengthen and support the work of member organizations — which can act as a meeting place and clearinghouse for these existing groups. By acting as a conduit for the sharing of their knowledge and innovations, a catalyst for new collaborative initiatives, and a well of new resources, this consortium — which we have given the working name N-TEN, or Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network — holds the potential to create the "big bang" that will work fundamental change in nonprofit attitudes toward, and use of, information technology.

N-TEN is envisioned as serving three key constituencies.

For technology assistance providers, N-TEN will be a means to share know-how and solutions with a far larger audience, a place to build connections to peer and partner organizations (nonprofit, governmental and private), a forum for learning from others and building upon their work, a point of access to an expanded pool of customers, and a source of expertise and support for emerging providers.

For the funding community, N-TEN will be a vehicle to obtain quality and leverage in their investments. By supporting groups that are members of the N-TEN network — and that in turn receive support from providers that are network members —funders will have the assurance that the technology efforts they support will be effectively used, widely shared, and easily replicated. For donors just venturing into technology grantmaking, or seeking a new approach to it, N-TEN can act as a partner and guide.

For nonprofits, N-TEN will be a place to turn for a guarantee of quality in the application of technology. By using providers committed to N-TEN principles, nonprofits will minimize the risks that they face. Nonprofits will also have access to N-TEN-developed tools they can use to measure their technology capacity against a set of benchmarks. Moreover, involvement with N-TEN will attract funder interest, since projects will be developed and implemented within a system that encourages ongoing evaluation, sharing, and support.
Through the N-TEN consortium, these three constituencies will work together in a reinforcing cycle, where the activity of each benefits the others – to the benefit of all.

N-Ten: Guiding Principles

The Planning Partners believe that N-TEN must be founded on four core principles: **1** Open Systems, **2** Technology Transparency, **3** Fair Exchange, and **4** Fair Compensation. These are the building blocks for creating a new way of doing nonprofit business, without which the sector is in danger of taking small, tentative steps that result in incremental — and insufficient — change.

The principle of **Open Systems** means that projects — not just software — are designed from the first instant so that they can be shared and cloned as easily as possible, and that, as with the Internet, the clones themselves can be cloned *ad infinitum*. It is a system that encourages the development of new tools and ways to share them, with the underlying assumption that no one entity owns them.

Nonprofits will make the most productive and innovative use of technology only when it becomes integrated into the way the entire staff thinks, works, and communicates — in other words, when it becomes transparent. This is the meaning of the principle of **Technology Transparency.** Transparency also means that learning and open evaluation will be ongoing activities at nonprofits in order to guarantee the high quality of work that makes leveraging and cloning worthwhile.

The principle of **Fair Exchange** — of resources, ideas, and intellectual assets — refers to the creation of an environment in which people and organizations that have these assets will be motivated to share them and receive appropriate compensation, perhaps monetary, but equally possibly in the form of other intellectual capital or bartered services.

Technological know-how will flourish in an environment in which people who have it are compensated fairly. Pay is an element of this, certainly, especially given private sector demand for technology skills. But compensation in intangibles like recognition, a feeling of contribution to an important cause, intellectual challenge, and opportunity to build new skills is no less important. This is meaning of the principle of **Fair Compensation.**

We believe if all players commit to these principles — and to working with those who commit themselves to practice the principles — nonprofits will find the vision to use technology well, funders will have the confidence to support such work, and technology assistance providers will be more effective. We also believe that these principles will attract many more new players, accelerating the commitment of nonprofits, funders and technology assistance providers to create and support technology in service of nonprofit missions.

N-TEN: Goals with Nonprofits

Based on input from nonprofits, technology assistance providers who work with nonprofits, and funders, the Planning Partners have identified several key goals N-TEN should pursue to aid nonprofits in making more effective use of technology:

1 Help nonprofits understand the impact that technology can have on their work. Nonprofits need to see what some peer organizations are already doing using a wide

The 4 Principles at Work

The NSNT Planning Partners believe that four principles are key to technological empowerment of nonprofits. Here are real-world illustrations of these principles in action.

OPEN SYSTEMS. *ebase, developed by the nonprofit group the Technology Project, is an easy-to-learn database nonprofits can use to track information on their constituents, and for quickly creating highly customized electronic and paper mailings. Besides being free, the architecture of ebase is open, enabling nonprofits and technology assistance providers to tailor the program to their specific needs. Users post details of such alterations and enhancements on the ebase Web site at http://www.ebase.org, where they can benefit other ebase users.*

TRANSPARENCY. *The Atlanta chapter of the American Red Cross has created a data warehouse that it uses in every aspect of operations. Using this tool, the Red Cross is better able to reach the right people at the right time when disaster strikes, "All disasters are run on computer now," says Dee Kellogg, the chapter's chief information officer. An added benefit is the dramatic savings the database has allowed in administrative expenses – down from 24% to 9% of budget.*

FAIR EXCHANGE. *NPower, in Seattle (HYPERLINK http://www.NPower.org, and the Chicago-based IT Resource Center (http://www.npo.net/itrc), both provide technology training to their nonprofit communities. Instead of each organization separately developing training curricula, the two organizations have begun sharing the curriculum development effort. When one organization improves or updates a curriculum, these modifications are shared with the sister organization. This fair exchange saves resources for both groups, and provides both communities' nonprofits with*

the benefit of curricula that is enhanced more frequently than would otherwise be possible, and in which more minds have invested their expertise.

FAIR COMPENSATION. *Theodore Sé-Gahon, could probably make more money if he worked at a large corporation. But his compensation as a computer network engineer at Catholic Community Services of Western Washington respects his skills' market value, and is regularly adjusted to keep the salary gap from becoming too vast. Theodore says he finds the monetary sacrfices worthwhile "because of the other benefits of the job," including the appreciation of his coworkers, being part of delivering social services he cares about, and the job's constant learning opportunities.*

range of technologies, including the Internet, electronic publishing, fax-on-demand, and video conferencing. Nonprofits also need to understand how technology can help shape entirely new services and programs, which is very different from seeing technology as a way of enabling them to do "old" things in "new" ways.

In particular, leaders of nonprofits — including boards of directors and executive directors — need to understand the value of technology in the organizations they run, since they make the ultimate decisions about resource allocation.

Those groups already integrating technology solutions, on the other hand, need, when possible, to become active participants in efforts to promote the benefits of technology to the sector — and to the funder community — and to encourage new users to take critical first steps toward becoming savvy users.

2 Help nonprofits view technology as an integral part of the organization. In order to have a major impact on an institution, technology needs to be pervasive — used by everyone for both back-office and programmatic activities, budgeted for appropriately (including training as well as hardware and software), and, most importantly, designed and implemented as part of a comprehensive organizational plan. This is the essence of the principle of Technology Transparency.

3 Help nonprofits evaluate their use of technology. Nonprofits need to evaluate their use of technology against a set of standards. They need to know what "best practices" are being used by their colleagues working in similar kinds of organizations. And they need tools to develop solid and realistic technology plans.

4 Help nonprofits gain access to appropriate and affordable help. No one — in any setting — can be expected to understand and implement technology-based solutions on their own, especially given how fast technology changes. Nonprofits need to know what assistance is available to them to incorporate technology into their work. They need to understand both how to find help and how to effectively make use of that help. They also need to know about the assistance that is available directly from software and hardware vendors, and about Web-based resources.

5 Help nonprofits understand and value the "human capacity" aspect of technology implementation. *People* make technology work; the "boxes" do nothing on their own. Nonprofits need to take into account the many human resource issues involved in successful technology implementation. Senior management and boards of directors need to understand the skills required within their organizations, appreciate the compensation and related aspects of hiring and retaining qualified technical staff, realize the importance of ongoing training and development of *all* staff with regard to technology use, and ensure that people with technology-related responsibilities are included in key organizational decisions.

6 Help nonprofits value ongoing learning about the role of technology in their work. Technology changes every day, even every hour. Moreover, as people become

more comfortable using technology tools, they invariably find other, new ways to use them. Therefore, every nonprofit staff member should have the opportunity and incentive to remain informed about the potential role of technology in their work — and beyond mere training on the latest software. Time — and money — need to be budgeted to allow for this on a continuous basis. This ongoing learning is another aspect of the principle of Technology Transparency.

7 Help nonprofits share their technology successes with others. A number of nonprofit groups are already using technology in powerful ways. Good models and materials have been developed, but too often these are not shared with groups that need to know about them. An environment is needed in which groups have the incentive to share their technology-based efforts, including success stories, through mechanisms that are widely available and easily accessible. Nonprofits are already under-resourced. Technology itself makes it possible to avoid re-inventing the wheel when an agency is exploring, for example, how to use the Internet to galvanize its members around an issue. In fact, the Planning Partners consider this kind of open sharing absolutely critical if technology use is to be expanded to the level that we envision.

8 Help nonprofits acquire appropriate software and hardware. Nothing can happen without appropriate hardware and software. Nonprofits need to acquire these products — including both new and used equipment — in ways that are efficient, cost-effective, and supported over time. Most importantly, nonprofits need to assess their needs so that what they acquire will accomplish what they want to do.

N-TEN: Goals with Technology Assistance Providers

Despite a variety of technology assistance providers — including site-based centers, "circuit riders," and volunteer-based efforts — there still is not enough help available to nonprofits that need it. Private technology assistance companies are usually not engaged in working with the nonprofit community, largely because they do not understand the nonprofit market or because their fees are prohibitive for all but the largest nonprofits.

Nonprofit technology assistance providers often operate in isolation and don't benefit from the work of their colleagues – spending much of their time re-creating what is being done is other communities around the nation.

N-TEN will work to strengthen technology assistance providers in the following ways:

1 Support technology assistance providers in receiving ongoing training in technology and nonprofit issues. Since providers are at the intersection between technology and nonprofit issues, they need to receive ongoing professional development in both fields in order to provide services to their clients.

2 Help technology assistance providers coalesce into a community where learning, resource-sharing, and problem-solving can occur. Technology assistance providers for nonprofits need to operate in an environment where resources and materials developed by one can be used by others. Such a community would address a related problem — namely, there is no comprehensive list of providers, including those organized as independent nonprofit groups, programs of nonprofits providing broad technical as-

sistance to other nonprofits, individual "circuit riders" supported by foundations, volunteers, consultants, and for-profit companies.

3 Help technology assistance providers contribute to the identification of model programs, trends, and long-term issues facing their clients. There needs to be an ongoing mechanism by which technology assistance providers can identify best practices, trends, and anticipated needs concerning nonprofits' use of technology. Because of their own expertise and contact with their clients, they are a critical source of information that could greatly impact the sector's use of technology.

4 Help foster new technology assistance providers. Many regions lack adequate technology assistance resources for nonprofits. Existing providers should be facilitated in expanding the amount and range of their services. And new providers of diverse kinds should be nurtured with start-up resources, detailed operational blueprints, and a community of supportive peers.

N-TEN: Goals with The Funding Community

The funding community — including private, family, and community foundations, as well as corporations — has increasingly been asked to support the technology-related efforts of their grantees. However, most foundations have been hesitant to fund these initiatives: they don't have the expertise to evaluate proposals, they view the provision of technology support as an example of general technical assistance (which many do not fund), they view computer hardware as a capital expense (which often falls outside funding guidelines), or they see technology as an operating expense (again, not covered by funders focusing on programs).

However, more and more foundations, seeing that many nonprofits are using technology to develop or enhance their programmatic activities, are beginning to fund these efforts. A few, including high-tech companies, have programs that explicitly focus on technology as a program area. And many corporations make in-kind contributions of hardware and software, encourage their employees to volunteer with nonprofit groups in order to share their technology-related skills, and sponsor nonprofit Web sites.

N-TEN will work with the funding community to strengthen understanding of, and commitment to, nonprofit technology in the following ways:

1 Help the funding community learn how technology can enhance the work of nonprofits — as well as their own organizations. Funders need to understand the various ways in which technology has already spurred new programs and improved existing ones that their grantees have undertaken. They also need to use technology more effectively within their own organizations, since this experience can have a direct impact on their willingness to fund efforts proposed by current and potential grantees.

2 Help funders come to view technology support as an element of their grantmaking. Far too often, funders — including contributors of hardware and software — do not ensure that grant recipients have thought about or have the resources for training and support. Greater efforts need to be made to involve technology assistance providers in technology-related grantmaking, whether as part of the evaluation of proposals or in supporting the implementation of specific projects (such as forming a partnership with a technology provider to assist grantees' efforts).

3 Help funders think differently about how to fund technology-related initiatives. Funders should be open to alternative funding strategies that reflect how technology can make the greatest impact on nonprofits. For example, they should be open to supporting projects undertaken by individual agencies, collaborative efforts that provide inter-agency or community-wide connections, educational efforts aimed at helping nonprofits use technology, and the development of Internet-based tools to assist nonprofits in the use of technology.

Funders also need to become involved in the evangelism activities discussed above, i.e., they need to encourage their colleagues at foundations and corporations to consider technology applications and assistance as a critical component of helping nonprofits deliver effective and timely services.

The Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Network: N-TEN

Possible Programs and Projects

The programs and projects of N-TEN will be shaped by its members. Likely initiatives include:

1 An incubator program for nonprofit technology assistance organizations. This program would work to increase the number of community-based, nonprofit technology assistance organizations by developing and distributing best practice models, tools, and resources to interested communities and grantmakers.

2 A "Nonprofit Technology Portal" on the World Wide Web. This portal — a kind of online co-op – would serve all organizations interested in nonprofit technology and be a place to find tools, skills, know-how, ideas, and partners to help nonprofits make resourceful use of technology.

3 Technology-use "best practice" benchmarks. With associated tools and resources, these benchmarks would help nonprofit organizations strategically integrate technology into their work.

4 A talent development program with educational institutions and private companies. This program would strive to increase the number of individuals trained, motivated, and able to provide technology assistance in a nonprofit setting.

5 Public/private partnerships with local and national high-tech companies. These partnerships would aim to increase the amount, type and quality of technology-related resources available to the nonprofit community and to encourage the development of nonprofit-specific software and support solutions.

6 A program to develop new financial resources for nonprofit technology initiatives. This reservoir of new financial resources would support nonprofit technology innovations.

1 An incubator program for nonprofit technology assistance organizations.

For funders and others exploring the support needs of the sector, good models of technology support to the nonprofit community are critical. In order to increase the number of community-based, nonprofit technology assistance providers, best practices need to be shared in the areas of organizational development, fundraising, outreach strategies, curriculum creation, staff development, and volunteer recruitment.

Many groups — including those operating under the umbrella of the Technology Resource Consortium — have been active for many years in this area and are excellent sources of help. However, in the view of many NSNT Planning Partners, this process of sharing best practices, tools, resources, and models needs to be formalized. N-TEN could develop an ongoing program to collect, evaluate, synthesize and distribute these models and resources to increase the number of community-based nonprofit technology assistance resources.

This Technology Assistance Provider Kit would, at a minimum, include the following components: model business plans, best practice digests, pointers to potential funders, nonprofit technology training curricula, and tools for service evaluation.

Already, two new efforts — NP*ower* in Seattle and Technology Works in Washington, D.C. — have been developed specifically with the N-TEN core principle of Open Systems in mind. For example, the business plan of NP*ower* (a center-based initiative) was designed to be a model for anyone interested in creating a local technology assistance center, and copies of the plan are freely available on the NP*ower* Web site (http://www.npower.org). The plan was based on a thorough analysis of the local nonprofit sector and its technol-

ogy support needs. Also, NP*ower* is developing tools to evaluate the effectiveness of its work, and, again, will share these with other groups providing technology help to nonprofits.

In Washington, D.C., Technology Works is exploring another model. Initial assessment has indicated that despite the region's sizable number of technology service providers, there is a chasm between the potential of technology and its application by nonprofits in support of their missions. Technology Works will strive to bridge this gap through: 1) technology leadership education for senior nonprofit staff, board members, and funders; 2) a "circuit riders" program that will extend the reach of D.C.'s existing nonprofit technology-focused volunteer and intern programs, and; 3) a comprehensive Web-based database of the area's technology resources. In the spirit of Open Systems, the tools and insights Technology Works develops in these efforts will be freely shared with all peer groups.

2 A "Nonprofit Technology Portal" on the World Wide Web.

N-TEN could develop a new nonprofit portal — a kind of online co-op — where nonprofits, technology service providers and grantmakers could congregate and locate the technology tools, resources, know-how, ideas, and partners they need to help them do their jobs better.

There are already a number of excellent nonprofit-oriented Web sites that include sections on technology. Examples include Philanthropy Journal Online (http://www.pj.org), Guidestar (http://www.guidestar.org), HandsNet (http://www.handsnet.org), OMB Watch (http://www.ombwatch.org), the Benton Foundation (http://www.benton.org), and The Urban Institute (http://www.urbaninstitute.org).

A chief role of an N-TEN portal would be aggregating these widely dispersed resources via a utility that comprehensively searches many different sites simultaneously. This capability would make the portal a one-stop shop for (most) everything and anything relating to nonprofit technology. Users could navigate speedily and without friction to exactly the resources they need, anywhere on the Internet.

Developing this "meta-site" will depend on fostering agreement among other sites regarding common standards, protocols, interfaces, and design philosophies. Keepers of such sites should see benefit in participating both because it will magnify their visibility and impact, and because their interaction with other N-TEN collaborators will present exciting opportunities for joint development of new nonprofit technology resources and tools, grounded, as always, in the bedrock principle of Open Systems.

Beyond the resources it aggregates from sites elsewhere on the Internet, the N-TEN portal could itself become a large repository of intellectual capital on nonprofit technology. Unique content that the N-TEN portal and partner groups could develop includes:

- **A national database of technology assistance resources.** Such a database would not only help nonprofits seeking technology assistance, but enable providers to connect to each other and forge collaborative ties. Moreover, it could help identify holes in the nation's network of nonprofit technology assistance.

- **Forums, chat rooms, and listservs** where nonprofits, technology assistance providers, and funders could network, compare notes, plan and conduct collaborations, exchange tips and tricks, coach each other through technology troubleshooting, and alert each other to phenomena like computer virus outbreaks.
- **A clearinghouse of sharable, extendable technology solutions.** These Open Systems solutions could include — to give just a few examples — databases for nonprofits to use in membership support, resource development, or client tracking; a customizable Java application a nonprofit could deploy to enliven a static Web site; or a dataset compiled by one nonprofit, and potentially useful to others (e.g., a merge of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) info with data on the locations of a region's jobs and the welfare recipients who need them).
- **News on technology developments of special interest to nonprofits.**
- **A showcase of nonprofit technology successes,** complete with both inspiration and practical how-to guidance.
- **A consumer comment corner** where nonprofit users of technology could offer candid assessments of different hardware, software, Internet Service Providers, technology assistance providers, etc.
- **Templates for technology assessments.**
- **Templates for technology planning.**
- **Template spreadsheets for technology budgeting.**
- **Leads on technology funding opportunities.**
- **Samples of well-conceived technology funding proposals.**
- **Online technology tutorials,** likely developed in collaboration with nonprofit technology assistance providers.
- **A jobs board** for technology-related positions with nonprofits, assistance providers, and funders, together with a mechanism for making application online.
- **A "best practices" benchmarking tool,** described in the section below.

Like commercial Web sites, the N-TEN portal could generate revenue from advertising, membership fees, and charges for transactions conducted over the portal, such as the sale of tech services or products. A kind of barter system might also be developed through which users could exchange products, services and know-how, with part of the value assigned these exchanges supporting the portal's operation.

3 Technology use "best practice" benchmarks.

While considerable anecdotal evidence supports the belief that technology can help nonprofits better achieve their missions, few resources are available for documenting technology's specific impacts, or for pinpointing nonprofits' best practices in the technology arena.

As a start toward addressing this deficit, the NSNT Planning Partners have developed a prototype assessment instrument (see http://www.sustain.org/nsnt) that any nonprofit can use to appraise its use of technology,

compare itself against other nonprofits that have completed the assessment, and roughly evaluate how its technology use is contributing to service delivery.

N-TEN would refine this prototype, elaborating it into the following tools available via the N-TEN portal:

- **A benchmarking tool.** This tool would identify the best uses of technology by nonprofits in the areas of operations, strategic planning, and internal and external communications. It also would show the best ways to continue paying for technology and to train staff to use it. And the tool would provide links to resources to help nonprofits put technology to the best possible use.
- **Standardized "survey-and-assessment" tools.** These would help nonprofits track and measure their use of technology in organizational planning and budgeting, daily operations, and internal and external communications. Nonprofits also could use the tools to find out how their use of technology compares to that of other groups using technology with high effectiveness.
- **Tools to analyze organizational data.** These would help nonprofits measure the impact of technology on their services and compare themselves to other nonprofits.

All the tools would be designed to work together. A nonprofit, for example, could use the "survey-and-assessment" tools to find out how well it is using technology. This data could then be anonymously fed into a utility on the N-TEN portal. This utility would generate a report comparing its technology practices to best practices in the sector, and/or it could offer comparisons to similar organizations.

Such a system would help individual nonprofits take stock of their own tech use. The system also would help establish and continually refine standards for the best uses of technology, and would track change in how the sector uses technology.

4 A talent development program with educational institutions and private companies.

To strategically use technology, nonprofit organizations need to have, either on staff or available for consultation, individuals who understand both the potential of technology, as well as the needs, strengths and challenges of the nonprofit. Currently, there is a lack of individuals possessing this combined knowledge.

N-TEN could work to develop partnerships with educational institutions and private companies to increase the pool of individuals trained and available to work on nonprofit technology-related issues. Specifically, N-TEN could work in four main areas to expand the pool of nonprofit technology talent:

Bridging the Divide Between the Technology and Nonprofit Worlds: Models that Work

TECHNOLOGY INTERNSHIPS WITH A HEART. *Netcorps (http://www.netcorps.org), a Eugene, Oregon-based organization working to increase the advocacy capacity of nonprofits, runs a unique internship program to recruit university students as the next wave of staff and volunteers in the nonprofit sector. Participants are provided with ten weeks of extensive training in nonprofit and technology issues and then matched with a nonprofit organization needing their skills. The volunteers gain important technical and nonprofit know-how, and the nonprofit gets vital technology assistance. It's a win/win.*

INCREASING VOLUNTEERISM AMONG THE TECHNOLOGY-SAVVY. *Organizations such as CompuMentor in San Francsico (http://www.compumentor.org) and Idealist (http://www.idealist.org), a Web-based organization, know that there are plenty of tech-knowledgeable individuals looking to help out. They work to match these volunteers with nonprofit groups needing their expertise. Volunteers develop client tracking databases, build Web sites, install LANs, and help trouble-shoot technology difficulties. The volunteers feel good about supporting the work of the nonprofits, and the nonprofits receive assistance they might not otherwise be able to afford.*

TRAINING THE NONPROFIT LEADERS OF TOMORROW: *Fresh initiatives are underway at the New School for Social Research in New York City and at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs in Seattle to make sure that tomorrow's nonprofit leaders appreciate technology's transformative potential. New curricula at these graduate schools introduce students to the ways nonprofit use, or could use technology, and the implications for organizational strategic planning, budgeting, the management of human resources, and agency culture.*

**Technology for Social Change—
Models that Work**

AN OPEN SYSTEMS DATABASE FOR NONPROFIT RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT. *The Technology Project (http://www.techproject.org), a nonprofit organization working to build the capacity of other nonprofits through technology, has developed a software solution to help nonprofits build and maintain their important relationships. ebase enables an organizationís membership, donation, and activist information to be kept in one place. ebase is free, and the software is completely open so that users can change it and contribute their improvements back to the community of ebase users.*

AN INTERNET TOOL FOR COUNTERING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE. *A victim of domestic violence frequently needs a legal Order of Protection to shield herself from her abuser. Speed is critical, since her well-being, even her life, could depend on getting the Order in time. Traditionally, the paperwork for an Order of Protection has been prepared by attorneys, usually working pro bono. But seldom are there enough volunteer attorneys to meet the need, and so the completion of paperwork, and the issuance of Orders, can be dangerously delayed. Recognizing the seriousness of this situation, the Fund for the City of New York, (HYPERLINK http://www.fcny.org, a group that provides nonprofits with technology assistance as part of its mission, took a bold step. It created an interactive Internet-based system which allows shelter staff, or even the victim herself, to generate Order paperwork without attorney assistance. So successful has the innovation proven that it has now spread — thanks to its Open Systems design — to jurisdictions far beyond New York City.*

- **Facilitating the development of trained, motivated technology professionals to serve as staff at nonprofit organizations.** This could include efforts to encourage schools of engineering to develop curricula, community outreach programs, internships, and career planning activities that expose students to potential careers in the nonprofit sector. All these efforts would include training in nonprofit issues — both management-related and programmatic — and how technology can impact them.

  Those technology professionals already working in nonprofits would be assisted by N-TEN (probably through the portal) in developing collegial networks, in receiving further professional development (on technology as well as nonprofit sector issues), and in learning of other technology-related career paths within the nonprofit world.

- **Facilitating training to help the people of nonprofits' capitalize on technology's full potential.** Just as those with technology skills need a solid background in nonprofit operations, so too do nonprofit staff and boardmembers need to understand what technology is capable of, and how to put that potential to work. Therefore, N-TEN would support the development of technology education that would enable those who work for and those who lead nonprofits to stay abreast of technological possibilities, and to acquire the hands-on skills to extract technology's full benefit. It is likely that these educational programs would be developed and delivered in conjunction with several existing organizations that provide excellent support programs for nonprofit staff, managers, and boardmembers.

- **Reaching out to corporations to recruit employees to volunteer with nonprofit groups.** Increased efforts could tap this huge resource of people trained in technology. Outreach would target companies (high-tech and others), volunteer centers, and special programs (such as CompuMentor) that match corporate volunteers with nonprofits in need of specific help. At the same time, the experience and lessons learned by these volunteers could be captured and become part of the knowledge base on the N-TEN portal.

  Outreach could also focus on recruiting individuals from the high-tech sector to serve on the boards of nonprofit groups, thereby helping boards to think through the technology issues related to an organization's work.

- **Educate individual consultants about nonprofit needs and solutions.** Since so many nonprofits make use of individual consultants for their technology needs, special efforts — such as bringing these consultants together in a network — could ensure that they are well-informed about best nonprofit technology practices and available nonprofit technology solutions. At the same time, the experience and lessons learned by these consultants could be captured and become part of the knowledge base on the N-TEN portal.

5 Public/private partnerships with local and national high-tech companies.

The high-tech sector has recently experienced tremendous expansion. Moreover, the potential for high tech products to have a dramatic impact in helping to address a wide range of social needs has also grown immensely. At the same time, the nonprofit sector has increased to an 8% share of the U.S. economy, and 1 in 10 U.S. jobs. These facts point to a significant opportunity to forge partnerships between the high-tech and the nonprofit sectors. Such partnerships could both boost the amount of technology resources available to the nonprofit sector, and provide businesses with a significant new market.

N-TEN could take a leadership in role in developing partnerships between high-tech companies and non-profit groups. N-TEN could, for example, facilitate in-kind and cash donations by the high-tech industry to the nonprofit sector by helping streamline and coordinate the current donation process. This could involve consolidating nonprofits' donation requests, linking software donations to accessible and affordable technology assistance, and creating social value for the participating companies.

Another important role N-TEN could play is encouraging the design of new software products that meet the specific needs of nonprofit organizations.

In pursuit of these goals, N-TEN could:

- **Coordinate a high-level industry-sponsored conference** to discuss how all key players can work together to more effectively meet increasing demands and to begin to create a common language to bridge the two sectors.
- **Work with existing nonprofit technology initiatives to create a single application for support —** or Tech Exchange — that nonprofit organizations would complete to request in-kind software and hardware donations. This process would require nonprofits to complete an on-line needs assessment, undertaken in conjunction with a sponsoring technology assistance provider that has agreed to the N-TEN core principles. This would benefit both nonprofits seeking donations and companies seeking to streamline their grantmaking process.
- **Develop tools and resources for the high-tech industry to assist them with evaluating grant requests from nonprofit organizations** – ensuring that the organization has the capacity to use donated software or hardware and that, if needed, they have identified a provider for assistance with installation, training, and support.
- **Work with the high-tech industry to explore how the in-kind donation process can be simplified and streamlined.** Means might include working with a national retailer, using electronic distribution of software, and shipping from a central warehouse that is managed by a nonprofit intermediary.

Some projects have already benefited from these kinds of creative partnerships. For example, a Hewlett-Packard initiative to support Bay Area child-care centers includes HP equipment and technical support from employee volunteers. Software is being donated by Microsoft Corporation, while the Packard Foundation will fund "circuit riders" — managed by the San Francisco-based Support Center for Nonprofit Management — to provide hands-on technical support to the child care centers and help secure other resources.

6 A program to develop new financial resources for nonprofit technology initiatives.

For the "big bang" strategy to succeed, funders will need to commit themselves to a coordinated series of initiatives that range from relatively small adjustments in current funding mechanisms to the creation of entirely new and bold giving programs.

N-TEN could work with foundations to both further their use of technology and develop programs to support the use of technology by the nonprofit sector. Specifically, N-TEN could:

- **Facilitate the creation of funding mechanisms that advance the effective use of technology by nonprofits.** One idea is the creation of a virtual community foundation — an "N-TEN Community Foundation" — that would both raise and distribute money and other resources. Like a traditional community foundation, it would be responsive to the needs of specific donors, and present opportunities for flexible and creative approaches to nonprofits' technology-related needs. For example, corporations and other funders could create donor-advised funds targeted to supporting specific sorts of projects, knowing that the foundation's staff and boardmembers will be experts in nonprofit technology issues. The foundation could also be the entity that raises funds and supports the major new initiatives described in this report — projects that will require the participation of many different groups already working on various aspects of technology use by nonprofits.
- **Develop tools and standards to help foundations look for and encourage grant proposals that agree to practice the NSNT principles and that in turn work with technology assistance providers committed to these principles.** By doing this, foundations will know that their investments will be highly leveraged, since the organizations that receive support will have agreed to make technology an integral part of their organizations and to share their work widely within the nonprofit sector.
- **Help foundations integrate technology into their own missions and funding strategies by the sharing of best practices and associated tools.** For example, foundations could make it a guideline/criterion that technology goals be integrated into the mission of their applicants. In requesting project budgets, foundations should encourage line items for technology purchases and maintenance, and should consider requesting applicants to routinely specify technology-related budget items as a percentage of overall program costs. Foundations can also require that certain technology solutions developed with grant dollars be shared openly with other nonprofit organizations.
- **Develop tools and resources that help foundations enhance their capacity to evaluate the technology components of proposals.** An example of this is already taking place in Chicago, where the Chicago Community Trust has turned to a local provider, the IT Resource Center, to help the foundation assess the technology aspects of grant proposals.
- **Encourage funders to be part of the effort to spread the word about what's working with regard to nonprofit technology initiatives.** N-TEN could help funders connect with other grantmakers and share grantees' technology-related success stories. These stories could be included in funders' annual reports and newsletters, on their Web sites, and in their outreach to the philanthropic press.

Information technology is powering our economy. It is changing the way we live, work, think, play and communicate. It is redefining the very nature of community.

For nonprofits that embrace technology, there are tremendous opportunities. For those that hold it at arm's length, there are genuine and unsettling dangers.

The N-TEN consortium holds exhilarating potential to help nonprofits, those who serve them, and those who support them philanthropically—

—the potential to accomplish more of the vital work which only nonprofits will undertake.

—the potential to free up resources for new nonprofit initiatives that will make our society more humane, our planet's beauty and integrity more secure, and our culture more vibrant.

We urge nonprofits, technology assistance groups, and the philanthropic community to join us now in turning this blueprint into a dynamic NTEN consortium. Let it embody all the energy, optimism, and possibility of this extraordinary information age.

We will meet you on the Internet: http://www.nten.org.

The National Strategy for Nonprofit Technology

The National Strategy for Nonprofit Technology planning process included a series of three "face-to-face" planning meetings during 1998 and were expanded through online discussions and other public forums, primarily the Philanthropy Journal's Nonprofits and Technology conference series in late 1998 and early 1999.

The National Strategy for Nonprofit Technology has been developed with the assistance of many individuals – all passionate about seeing the nonprofit sector use technology in service of mission, and all bringing unique experiences and viewpoints to bear during the year-long planning process. This report contains many recommendations, and not every recommendation received consensus agreement among all Planning Partners. There was consensus, however, around the need for a radical change in how the nonprofit sector is using technology in service of mission – the need for a "big bang." Healthy differences exist concerning the best tactical approaches for achieving this big bang transformation. All Partners, however, are committed to supporting the creative and collaborative growth of the movement of empowering nonprofits with technology, in whatever form this may take.

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Support for the planning phase of the NSNT was generously provided by Microsoft Corporation, the Surdna Foundation, the W. Alton Jones Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Rockefeller Family Fund, and the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation.